

*“She walked into the room, a blonde, blue-eyed child, barely seven, her head bowed, eyes unable to look at the two investigators in the room. She walked straight to the only male in the room, positioning herself in front of him. With no hesitation, this hapless little girl lifted her dress, just as she had so many other times in her short life, and waited for the abuse to start.” (From Police Chief magazine, December 2005)*



For many the mere description of what this sad, helpless girl has been programmed to do after countless sessions of abuse draws anger, frustration and maybe a bit of fear as the true picture of her trauma is laid bare. The scary reality is that this is not a unique case. In fact, each day this same scenario plays out in abuse victims all over the commonwealth. What we don't typically have to witness when we hear about these stories of abuse are the visual depictions of the abuse while it occurs. That, however, is changing at an ever increasing pace.

As the number of digital devices with picture capabilities dramatically increases, it is now far easier for an offender to capture the abuse of a child in pictures and videos. This image can now be relived by the offender over and over at will for their own sexual gratification. It also allows this media to be traded all over the world, in effect reoffending the victim each time it's traded, possibly over a period of years. Victims who, unfortunately, have been recorded during their abuse continue to be traumatized knowing that those images are still out there, somewhere, being traded from person to person possibly forever.

The Internet is great in that you can find an answer for just about any question you may have. One of the unfortunate side effects is that once something is “on the net,” it is nearly impossible to completely remove it.

In these circumstances, as child pornography is traded from person to person, it can quickly spider web to areas outside the U.S. and the laws that help regulate this illegal activity. Child pornography collectors can maintain images over periods of

years, always looking out for what's new to add to their personal files. These files will then continue to be traded, potentially spreading the abuse images to pornographers all over the world.

One commonly traded series of files, often identified as the “Vicky” series, involves various depictions of a young girl's abuse at the hands of her father. The victim, now in her 20s, must still deal with the horrifying aftermath over a decade after her abuse finally ended. During a recent trial in New York, her victim impact statement was read at the sentencing hearing. It said in part:

“I wonder if the people I know have seen these images. I wonder if the men I pass in the grocery store have seen them. Because the most intimate parts of me are being viewed by thousands of strangers and traded around, I feel out of control. They are trading my trauma around like treats at a party, but it is far from innocent. It feels like I am being raped by each and every one of them.”

In her statement, she described enduring flashbacks, nightmares and paranoia. Crowds were unbearable, she said, and she withdrew from college because of panic attacks. These victims, faces frozen in time, can never escape the reality that those images could continue to be shared for years beyond their abuse.

The Kentucky State Police Electronic Crime Branch is part of an Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, which is made up of dozens of police and investigative agencies throughout the state. KSP administers the task force, one of 61 coordinated task forces created nationwide, in an effort to try to combat the growing problem of child sexual exploitation cases, >>